

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 IO-10 COME-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01

CIEP-01 FRB-03 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00

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MC-02 ACDA-05 /089 W

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R 181152Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2984

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 6782

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJ: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT'S FIRST THIRTY DAYS

SUMMARY. THE GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT HAS THUS FAR FOCUSED MUCH OF ITS ATTENTION ON RURAL AREAS--FARMERS' PROBLEMS AND THE GOVERNMENT'S LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT. IT RESOLVED THE POLICE STRIKE IN NAKHON SI THAMMARAT BY RESPONDING FLEXIBLY TO BOTH THOSE WHO DEMAND CHANGE AND THOSE WHO DEMAND LAW AND ORDER. IT HAS MADE FREQUENT STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS ON FOREIGN POLICY, AND IS BEGINNING TO REASSESS THAI/U.S. RELATIONS IN THE WAKE OF THE INDOCHINA DEBACLE. IT IS ALSO DEVOTING MUCH
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OF ITS TIME TO SHEER SURVIVAL BY IMPROVING COHESION

WITHIN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT AND AMONG THE PARTIES
THAT SUPPORT IT. EMD SUMMARY.

1. THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT, WHICH FORMALLY TOOK
OFFICE ON 17 MARCH 1975, HAS SPENT MUCH OF ITS FIRST
30 DAYS FOCUSING ON THE PROBLEMS OF RURAL AREAS. IT
IS PUSHING AHEAD ITS POLICY OF ALLOCATING 2.5 BILLION
BAHT (US\$125 MILLION) FROM THE CURRENT BUDGET TO
PRECINCT COUNCILS FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS,
BUT HAS NOT YET PROPOSED LEGISLATION TO IMPLEMENT
OTHER PROMISES IN THIS AMBITIOUS POLICY STATEMENT
(BANGKOK 5419). KHUKRIT HAS MET WITH PROTESTING
FARMERS IN BANGKOK SEVERAL TIMES, AND PROMISED ON
APRIL 3 TO DRAFT LEGISLATION WITHIN TWO WEEKS CREATING
SPECIAL COURTS TO RESOLVE LAND DISPUTES. KHUKRIT
AND OTHER CABINET MEMBERS, IN A HAPPY DEPARTURE FROM
THE STYLE OF BOTH SANYA THAMMASAK AND THANOM
KITTIKHACHON, HAVE ALSO TRAVELLED TO OUTLYING PROVINCES
IN CENTRAL AND NORTH THAILAND TO MEET WITH FARMERS
AND DISCUSS THEIR PROBLEMS. WHILE FARMERS REMAIN
SKEPTICAL, THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT HAS AT LEAST
DEMONSTRATED A GREATER THAN USUAL INTEREST IN RURAL
THAILAND.

2. THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT CAME TO OFFICE PROMISING
A FIRM BUT JUST STANCE ON LAW AND ORDER. ONE DAY
AFTER WINNING A PARLIAMENTARY VOTE OF CONFIDENCE,
KHUKRIT THREATENED TO FIRE POLICE DIRECTOR GENERAL PHOT
PHEKANAN IF HE FAILED TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER IN THE
COUNTRY. THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF ITS FIRST TEST
DID NOT INSPIRE CONFIDENCE IN ITS FIRMNESS, HOWEVER.
AFTER ARRESTING 17 STUDENTS AND ACTIVISTS INVOLVED
IN THE FEBRUARY 1975 BURNING OF THE GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE
IN NAKHON SI THAMMARAT, THE GOVERNMENT YIELDED TO
PROTESTORS' DEMANDS AND RELEASED MOST OF THE 17
SUSPECTS. THIS DECISION LED TO A FOUR-DAY POLICE
STRIKE IN THE SOUTH, WHICH ENDED WHEN THE GOVERNMENT
YIELDED TO MOST OF THE STRIKING POLICEMEN'S DEMANDS.
WHILE THE FLEXIBILITY IN RESPONDING TO THE DEMANDS OF
BOTH THOSE WHO CALLED FOR POLITICAL REFORM AND THOSE
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WHO INSISTED ON LAW AND ORDER RESOLVED THE IMMEDIATE
CRISIS, CONSERVATIVES WONDER WHETHER THE KHUKRIT
GOVERNMENT WILL REACT TO FUTURE PROTESTS BY GIVING
IN TO THE DEMONSTRATORS (BANGKOK 5982).

3. THE KHUKRIT CABINET HAS THUS FAR CONDUCTED SOME OF ITS
FOREIGN POLICY THROUGH FREQUENT, EXTEMPORANEOUS, AND OFTEN
CONTRADICTORY STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS. IT PUBLICLY

ANNOUNCED AN END TO U.S. MILITARY EQUIPMENT DELIVERIES TO CAMBODIA THROUGH THAILAND, WHILE PRIVATELY ALLOWING THESE DELIVERIES TO CONTINUE. THIS PENCHANT FOR PUBLIC STATEMENT HAS EMBARRASSED THE GOVERNMENT ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION. KHUKRIT MISTAKENLY TOLD THE PRESS ON APRIL 3 THAT PHNOM PENH HAD FALLEN. FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN LATER ANNOUNCED THAT GKR PRIME MINISTER LONG BORET HAD HELD TALKS WITH KHMER COMMUNISTS IN BANGKOK, WHICH KHUKRIT DENIED THE NEXT DAY. TO PREVENT SUCH FIASCOS IN THE FUTURE, KHUKRIT ON APRIL 11 ASKED HIS CABINET MEMBERS (ESPECIALLY CHATCHAI) TO KEEP THEIR LIPS ZIPPERED AND PADLOCKED.

4. THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT HAS BEGUN TO REASSESS THAI/U.S. RELATIONS. IT HAS PRESSED US TO BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS IMMEDIATELY FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICAN FORCES WITHIN KHUKRIT'S OFT-STATED ONE-YEAR DEADLINE. THE RAPIDLY CHANGING SITUATION IN THIS REGION IS FORCING THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT TO RETHINK RTG FOREIGN POLICY. IT HAS NOT YET REACHED ANY CONCLUSIONS, BUT IS MOVING AHEAD ALONG DIVERGENT TRACKS. WE DISCUSSED THESE TRENDS IN BANGKOK 5946 AND BANGKOK 6577.

5. THE GOVERNMENT IS DEVOTING MUCH OF ITS ATTENTION TO IMPROVING COHESION WITHIN THE UNWIELDY MULTI-PARTY COALITION THAT SUPPORTS IT. IT HAS HELD

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MC-02 ACDA-05 /089 W

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R 181152Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2985

INFO

UKOBT/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 4919
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
DIA WASHDC
CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 6782

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

MEETINGS OF ALL MP'S OF PARTIES SUPPORTING THE GOVERN-
MENT,BUT DENIED THAT IT INTENDS TO FORM THEM INTO A
SINGLE PARTY. KHUKRIT ALSO HELD A SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 11 TO DISCUSS GOVERNMENT PER-
FORMANCE WITH ONLY
CABINET MEMBERS PRESENT, AND ANNOUNCED THAT HE
WILL HOLD MORE SUCH MEETINGS IN THE FUTURE. HE FILLED
THE FORMERLY VACANT POST OF DEPUTY COMMERCE
MINISTER
WITH CHAISIRI RUANGKANSET, LEADER OF THE PEOPLE'S
JUSTICE PARTY. CHAISIRI IS A SINO-THAI FROM UBON
WITH AN UNSAVORY PAST, BUT KHUKRIT NEEES THE SUPPORT
OF THE SIX SEATS HIS PARTY REPRESENTS. KHUKRIT WILL
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TRY TO USE FOUR REMAINING DEPUTY MINISTER POSTS TO

FURTHER CONSOLIDATE PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT FOR THE
GOVERNMENT, BUT WILL PROBABLY
HAVE TO COMPROMISE BY
SELECTING INDIVIDUALS, LIKE SHAISIRI, THAT HE MIGHT
NOT PERSONALLY PREFER. BOTH KHUKRIT AND AGRICULTURE
MINISTER
THAWIT KLINPRATHUM HAVE DENIED NEWS REPORTS
THAT THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY
IS DEMANDING THAT THAWIT
BE GIVEN THE CONCURRENT TITLE OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER.
THIS DEBATE, AND THE DELAY IN FILLING THE FOUR
REMAINING
DEPUTY MINISTER POSTS, EXPOSE THE COALITION'S WEAKNESS
AND ITS SHAKY IMAGE.

6. KHUKRIT HAS RECENTLY EXPRESSED PRIVATELY TO
EMBASSY OFFICERS HIS DISCOURAGEMENT OVER THE MANY
PROBLEMS FACING HIM: THE SITUATIONS IN CAMBODIA AND
VIETNAM, A DIVISIVE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY,STUDENT PROTESTS,

AND THE TEMCO AFFAIRS. HE TOLD THE CHARGE APRIL 14
THAT HE HAD MORE FUN BEING THE PRIME MINISTER OF
SARKHAN, A ROLE THAT HE PLAYED IN THE MOVIE "THE UGLY
AMERICAN," THAN BEING PRIME MINISTER OF THAILAND.
WHILE KHUKRIT REMAINS THE KEY LINK HOLDING HIS
COALITION TOGETHER, HE DOES NOT DOMINATE HIS CABINET.

7. CONCLUSION. ONLY A MONTH IN OFFICE IS INSUFFICIENT
TIME TO MAKE A DEFINITE JUDGMENT OF THE KHUKRIT
GOVERNMENT. IT HAS DEMONSTRATED ITS INTENTION TO
IMPLEMENT ITS POLICY OF GREATER ATTENTION TO RURAL
AREAS.
THIS IS THE RIGHT ORDER OF PRIORITIES. IT IS STILL GRAPPLING
WITH ITS APPROACH TO COMPLICATEE ISSUES OF LAW AND ORDER,
AND OF FOREIGN POLICY. IT IS MOVING TO GET ITS OWN HOUSE IN
ORDER
AND TO FURTHER CONSOLIDATE ITS SUPPORT IN PARLIAMENT.
THE BEGINNING THUS SHOWS FORWARD MOVEMENT AND MODEST
PROGRESS.

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